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# DEBRA FERGUSON

## Small Business Success, Export Marketing, and Changing Cultural Attitudes

Undaunted by what others may see as adversity, Deb has proven herself able to see opportunities and to embrace the challenges of life.

She couples an extensive and successful background in business with a passion for life and adventure.

The development of her successful business, Zootz Australia Pty Ltd, came from very humble beginnings. It was her husband's death from melanoma in 1984 that drove Deb to find a means to fight what is a preventable disease, by designing the world's first ultra violet protection swimsuit.

Beginning in 1991, without any money, she had a mortgage and no background in business. It was the peak of the recession and the cards were stacked against her. But it was a passion and vision of innovating a product aimed to reduce Australia's increasing melanoma rate that inspired Deb.

It was not easy. It required focus and determination. But hard times were not new to Deb and so the troubles became challenges. What was a humble idea in 1991, became an international product in just five years. The business community applauded her efforts and success and the Zootz suit changed a consciousness in Australian society.

In 1997, Deb realised she had achieved and exceeded even her wildest dreams, so sold the business and bought a one way ticket to Trinidad to begin a new chapter.

From a business career where Deb moved like greased lightning for six years, she was now faced with two years of travelling at 5 knots per hour. There could not have been a greater contrast. Revelations on living, life, values and the enjoyment of simplicity were now her reality.

It was an adventure that even the headiest of days of Zootz Australia could not have prepared her for - a two person sailing journey through the Caribbean, Panama Canal and across the Pacific Ocean. Remote islands and peoples were visited. Storms and tempest were survived and she learnt the lessons of resilience in a most physical and confronting way.

After reassessing her core understanding of community and work, Deb returned to Melbourne. A long period of readjustment followed. In the past three years, Deb turned her innate energy to contributing to the prevention of drug misuse in the community, especially with young people. The past six months has seen her establish a new business - Agents for Change, a partnership whose mission is to empower, educate and connect people of all ages through resilience and capacity building.

It is her optimism, determination and passion that sets Deb apart, where many new exciting chapters await.

### **MEDIA COVERAGE**

Nationally, from 1991 to 1996, twenty-seven articles have been printed about Debra Ferguson and her products. These topics including product innovation, women and business success and cancer prevention. Publications include the Business Review Weekly, Small Business Success Magazine and The Age.

Zootz Australia enjoyed state and national coverage in over thirteen television programs. These include, a live ten minute segment on 'The Midday Show with Ray Martin' and the ABC TV/Monash University Open Learning Program. This ABC segment is part of the Marketing Course and is repeated nationally over a ten-year period to 2005.

### **INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE**

The innovative success of Zootz Australia enjoyed international coverage, particularly in Europe. Twelve print and television segments were secured which included the BBC and GMTV United Kingdom.